

SUBMITTED BY REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT AUSTRALIA (RDA) HUME

FEEDBACK ON DRAFT GUIDELINES FOR THE NATIONAL REGIONAL ROADS

AUSTRALIA MOBILE PROGRAM (NATIONAL RRAMP)*

July 2026

RDA Hume welcomes the opportunity to comment on the draft Guidelines for the *National Regional Roads Australia Mobile Program (National RRAMP)*, in particular Section 5.1.2 – Infrastructure.

RDA Hume supports the intent of the program to fund both the construction of new mobile infrastructure and the upgrade of existing infrastructure to enable the delivery of services by at least two mobile network operators (MNOs). This is an important mechanism for improving competition, coverage and service reliability across regional Australia.

RDA Hume believes the draft *National Regional Roads Australia Mobile Program (National RRAMP)* Guidelines could be strengthened to ensure funded projects deliver the level of resilience, equity and coverage outcomes required in regional and remote settings, and particularly in the Hume region of North East Victoria.

While the current draft appropriately supports both new and upgraded mobile infrastructure, there is an opportunity to improve the Guidelines by more clearly prioritising resilience, black spot reduction and technology flexibility.

Key issues

Regional communities, freight routes and emergency corridors across the Hume region of Victoria continue to experience patchy or non-existent mobile coverage, compounded by power outages, bushfire risk, floods and storm events. In these settings, mobile infrastructure is not simply a commercial asset, it is essential public safety infrastructure. Sites without adequate back-up power can fail during emergencies, precisely when communities, travellers and emergency services need connectivity most. Likewise, if funding is not targeted towards known black spots, there is a risk that investment may favour easier or more commercially attractive locations rather than areas of highest need.



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This is particularly important in the Hume region, which includes major transport routes such as the Hume Freeway, the Goulburn Valley Highway, and regional roads connecting dispersed townships, agricultural areas and tourism destinations.

North East Victoria is also highly exposed to natural disasters, including bushfires and flooding, which have repeatedly demonstrated the importance of reliable telecommunications for warnings, evacuation and response. For example, during the Longwood fires in January 2026, an 18-hour power outage cut communications for outlying communities. In small rural communities, lack of mobile coverage can create serious risks for residents, road users, local emergency service responders.

It is recommended that Section 5.1.2 - Infrastructure place greater emphasis on three matters for eligible grant proponents:

1. mandatory back-up power for funded infrastructure
2. prioritisation of projects addressing existing mobile black spot areas
3. favourable consideration of projects incorporating satellite technology for the most remote locations

1. Mandatory back-up power

The draft Guidelines currently state that infrastructure must, where technically feasible, include an auxiliary back-up power supply providing a minimum of 12 hours of back-up power in the event of loss of external power. This requirement is strongly supported.

RDA Hume believe consideration should be given to strengthening this provision to minimum 24 hours, so that back-up power is treated as a core resilience requirement for regional telecommunications projects, rather than as a secondary project feature.

In regional areas, telecommunications infrastructure is critical during emergencies, including bushfires, storms and flood events, when loss of mains power is more likely and when communities are most reliant on mobile communications. In these circumstances, network failure can significantly affect access to emergency warnings, Triple Zero services, inter-agency coordination and public information. For these reasons, infrastructure funded under this program should be required to incorporate minimum 24 hours back-up power, and proponents should be expected to demonstrate clearly how resilience has been addressed in project design.



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This issue is particularly significant in the Hume region of North East Victoria, which has a history of major bushfire and severe weather events and contains extensive regional and rural road networks. Mobile service continuity during prolonged outages is critical for local communities, freight operators, visitors and emergency responders.

2. Prioritisation of existing mobile black spot areas

Under Section 5.1.2 of the Guidelines, project eligibility would benefit from a stronger direction that applications addressing existing mobile black spot areasⁱ would be prioritised and identified as desirable projects under the program.

RDA Hume would support an amendment to the final paragraph of 5.1.2 to include “*The infrastructure must, where technically feasible, include an auxiliary back-up power supply which provides back-up power for a minimum of 24 hours in the event of the loss of external power to the site and address existing mobile black spot areas.*”

This would help ensure that public investment is directed to areas of greatest need and greatest public benefit.

Regional communities continue to experience persistent coverage gaps that affect safety, productivity and access to essential services. Along regional roads and in smaller communities, mobile black spots can prevent motorists from contacting emergency services, disrupt business activity, interrupt farming and agricultural practices, and reduce confidence for residents and visitors. While the expansion of multi-operator infrastructure is an important objective, the program should explicitly recognise that addressing entrenched black spots is a priority public policy outcome.

This is especially relevant in Hume, where dispersed settlements, mountainous terrain, agricultural land use and major transport corridors contribute to uneven mobile coverage outcomes. The region includes nationally significant freight and passenger routes, and reliable telecommunications coverage across these corridors is essential to support road safety, economic activity and disaster preparedness.

3. Use of satellite technology in remote areas

RDA Hume recommends that project applications be viewed favourably during the assessment process where they incorporate satellite technology, or other hybrid telecommunications solutions, to service the most remote or technically challenging areas.



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In some locations, terrestrial mobile infrastructure alone may not provide the most efficient or practical solution due to terrain, remoteness, cost or low population density. In these circumstances, satellite-enabled approaches may provide an important complementary option to improve service reach and resilience.

Recognising this in the assessment framework would encourage innovation and help ensure that communities in the most difficult-to-service areas are not excluded from the benefits of the program.

This is relevant to parts of North East Victoria where alpine terrain, isolated road corridors and small remote communities can present challenges for traditional infrastructure deployment. A more technology-neutral approach would support better value for money and broader coverage outcomes.

Recommendations

RDA Hume recommends that the Guidelines be amended to provide stronger direction in three areas:

Issue	Recommendation	Why it matters for Hume
Insufficient infrastructure resilience	Require mandatory auxiliary back-up power in all funded regional telecommunications projects, with a minimum 24-hour standard where technically feasible, and stronger encouragement for longer duration in high-risk areas	Power disruption is common during bushfires and storms in North East Victoria. Back-up power helps maintain access to Triple Zero, emergency warnings and coordination during outages
Risk that funding does not target highest-need areas	Prioritise applications that directly address existing mobile black spot areas, and identify these as desirable projects in the assessment criteria	Many communities and road corridors in Hume still experience unreliable coverage. Prioritising black spots ensures public investment is directed to areas with the greatest safety and equity need
Difficulty servicing very remote or challenging terrain	View applications more favourably where they incorporate satellite technology	Parts of regional and alpine Victoria are difficult and costly to serve through terrestrial

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	or hybrid delivery models to service the most remote areas	infrastructure alone. Satellite-enabled solutions can improve reach and value for money
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Why this is important

Reliable connectivity in regional Victoria supports public safety, economic participation, freight efficiency, tourism and social inclusion. Telecommunications infrastructure is not only a matter of convenience or commercial service delivery. It is essential enabling infrastructure for public safety, emergency management, regional development and community resilience. Improvements to mobile coverage and network resilience can deliver substantial benefits for road users, freight operators, residents, businesses and emergency services across the region.

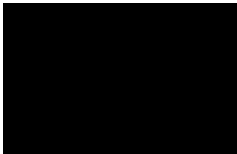
Summary

In summary, Section 5.1.2 would be improved by explicitly stating the following:

- 1. requiring mandatory back-up power for minimum 24 hours for funded infrastructure projects;
- 2. prioritising projects that address existing mobile black spots; and
- 3. favouring proposals that include satellite capability for the hardest-to-reach areas.

These changes would better align the Guidelines with the needs of the Hume Region and North East Victoria, where mobile connectivity is a critical enabler of safety, disaster resilience and regional development.

Kind regards



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Chair - RDA Hume



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For further information please contact [REDACTED]*

ⁱ [Mobile Black Spot Program](#)

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